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THE PEOPLE, THE PRESS & POLITICS 1990
After The Election

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DEMOCRATS AND CAMPAIGN COMMERCIALS ALSO GET BETTER REVIEWS

PUBLIC OPINION OF ELECTION COVERAGE IMPROVES

American voters gave the press a C+ grade for its coverage of the 1990 campaign, but that is a substantial improvement over the D+ grade the press received for its coverage of the 1988 presidential campaign.

The press received better ratings than the parties and the campaign professionals for Election '90. In 1988, when voters were highly displeased with the conduct of the campaign, the press took more heat than Bush, Dukakis, the parties or the pros. The Democratic Party also improved its performance in the eyes of the voters, moving from a C- in 1988 to a solid C in the 1990 campaign.

Evaluations of the Republican Party in this fall's campaign were largely unchanged from 1988 and slightly less positive than the ratings given the Democrats. Pollsters and campaign consultants also received the same "C" ratings this year that they received in 1988.

American voters have a better opinion of the press overall this year because they are less likely than in 1988 to see the press as exerting too much influence on the election process.

Times Mirror ***The People & The Press*** surveys throughout the 1988 presidential campaign found many voters thinking that press coverage was playing a determining role in the outcome of the election. In late October 1988, Times Mirror found 58% of registered voters saying the press had too much influence on the elections. Only 36% said the press exerted the right amount of influence.

In this week's survey, these figures are reversed: only 31% thought the press had too much influence on who won in 1990, while the majority, (56%), felt the press exerted the right amount of influence.

Voters in states with hotly contested and controversial elections such as North Carolina, Texas, Minnesota, California and Massachusetts, were somewhat more likely than voters in other parts of the country to see the press as exerting too much of an influence (36%), but these feelings were well below the level recorded for the presidential election in 1988.

An improved impression of the press overall -- and a perceived decline in its political influence specifically -- was evident among all groups of voters. However, as in prior surveys, Democrats and women expressed less criticism of the press than Republicans, Independents or men. Sixty percent of women and 63% of Democrats thought the press exerted proper influence on the outcome of the elections.

Despite the decline in the president's approval rating and the recent media focus on Bush's "flip flops", the vast majority of the public (72%) feels the press is being fair

to the Bush administration. But, this is a somewhat smaller percentage than felt that way in 1989 (82%).

Press Critiques of Candidate Commercials Approved

Four in ten voters nationwide (38%) were aware of news stories that reviewed campaign commercials and advertisements. No fewer than 73% of these voters said they approved of such news reporting, and only 23% disapproved. In the high drama states, 45% of registered voters were aware of press reviews of political commercials -- and fully ***80%*** of voters approved of such reporting.

These opinions notwithstanding, the public is clearly more positive about political commercials than it was three years ago. The percentage of voters who think commercials provided a better idea of where the candidate stood on issues than news reports increased from 13% in 1987 to 28% currently. The percentage of voters who think commercials provided a better idea of what a candidate is like personally increased from 23% to 38%. In fact, among some key voter groups, slight ***pluralities felt that commercials provided better information about candidates personally than news reports.***

* Among voters under 30 years of age, commercials were slightly favored; commercials (49%) vs. news reports (45%).

* Among blacks, opinion also divided about evenly, with a slight plurality for commercials; commercials (50%) vs. news reports (44%).

* Among voters who did not finish high school, opinion split evenly between tv commercials (44%) and news reports (44%).

In 1987, while younger people and blacks were somewhat more attuned to commercials than news reports, clear majorities felt that generally news reports provided better information than did commercials!

Although more voters now see informational value in political tv commercials and advertisements, substantial numbers of voters continue to complain that they do not learn enough from the campaign to make an informed choice between candidates. Sixty percent of all voters said they learned enough from the campaign to make an informed choice on election day. But, as in 1988, four in ten (38%) said it was difficult to choose because they had not learned enough from the campaign.

Ironically, in the high drama states of California, Texas, North Carolina, Massachusetts, and Minnesota, where the campaigns were the most extensive and expensive, voters felt much more bereft of information. Only 50% felt they learned enough from the campaign to make an informed choice, while 47% did not!

How Deep the Cynicism

Only one in four Americans is ***very*** satisfied with the outcome of the elections in their state (25%) while about half (48%) say they are somewhat satisfied. Twenty-two percent were not satisfied. Democrats took more satisfaction than Republicans; 33% of Democrats were very satisfied compared with 24% of Republicans.

The best measure of contentment with the political system is the degree to which the electorate turns out. This year's election drew 36% of the voting age population -- somewhat less participation than in 1986. The Times Mirror survey asked respondents who were acknowledged nonvoters how they felt about the outcome of the election and how they felt about not voting.

Admitted nonvoters rated the outcome of the election in about the same equivocal way as other respondents, but they were more apt to express no opinion about it. Twenty-one percent said they were very satisfied with the outcome of the election, 49% somewhat satisfied and 16% not satisfied. Fourteen percent had no view on the outcome of the elections, compared to one percent with no opinion among those who said they voted.

More significantly, the nonvoters questioned expressed little remorse about not having participated. Only about a third of nonvoters said they wished they had voted while 13% said they were glad they didn't vote, and a 45% plurality said they had mixed feelings about not voting.

Political Indicators for 1992

In the current survey, the President's approval rating stands at 49%, with 30% of the public saying they disapprove of the way George Bush is carrying out his job. As shown in the table below, this is the third consecutive month in which Bush's ratings have slipped in the Times Mirror poll.

Bush Approval Rating's

	Nov 90	*Oct 90*	*Sept 90*	*Aug 90*	*July 90*
Approve	49	55	68	76	64
Disapprove	30	28	15	17	24
Don't know	21	17	17	7	12
	100	100	100	100	100

As troubling as Bush's ratings may be to the GOP, when Bush is tested against his most frequently mentioned potential rival for 1992, he leads Mario Cuomo by a margin of 50% to 37% among registered voters interviewed by Times Mirror.

The "internals" of the poll suggest that this measure may not be a good indicator of Bush's true electoral strength. Cuomo only received support from two-thirds of the Democrats surveyed, while 86% of Republicans supported George Bush. Low Democratic loyalty in this poll may have more to do with Democrats not having fixed on a candidate than with support for Bush, who now has a 33% approval rating among Democrats.

Candidate Support:	Party Affiliation		
	Republican	*Democrat*	*Independent*
Bush/Leaning	86	22	51
Cuomo/Leaning	8	65	34
Other/Undecided	6	13	15
	100	100	100
# of Interviews	(281)	(319)	(332)

This very early test of candidate strength should be placed in the perspective of the first post mid-term election Gallup Poll four years ago and eight years ago. Gary Hart led George Bush in January 1987 by an almost identical margin to what Bush now leads Cuomo - 51% Hart, 38% Bush. And in January of 1983, Walter Mondale led a recession-battered Ronald Reagan 52% to 40%.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey results are based on telephone interviews conducted under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates among 1,208 adults, 18 years of age or older, during the period of November 8-11, 1990. For results based on the total sample, one can say with 95% confidence that the error attributable to sampling and other random effects is plus or minus 3 percentage points. In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

THE PEOPLE, THE PRESS & POLITICS 1990
November 8-11, 1990
n=1208

Q.1 Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as President?

49	Approve
30	Disapprove
21	Don't know
100	

Q.2 Suppose the 1992 Presidential election were being held today. If George Bush was the Republican candidate and New York Governor Mario Cuomo were the Democratic candidate who would you like to see win?

	RV's		
50	50	George Bush/Leaners	┐
			├ GO TO Q.4
36	37	Mario Cuomo/Leaners	┘
14	13	Other/Undecided	
100	100		

Q.3 As of today, do you lean more to George Bush, the Republican or do you lean more to Mario Cuomo the Democrat?

George Bush

Mario Cuomo

Other

Undecided

Q.4 Are the news organizations you are most familiar with fair or unfair to the Bush Administration?

		8/89
72	Fair	82
15	Unfair	12
13	Don't know	6
100		100

NOW I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU A FEW QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ELECTIONS THIS PAST WEEK.

Q.5 All things considered, how satisfied were you with the outcome of the elections in your state?

25	Very satisfied
48	Somewhat satisfied
12	Not very satisfied
10	Not at all satisfied
5	Don't know
100	

Q.6 Are you now registered to vote in your precinct or election district?

80	Yes
20	No, not sure - **GO TO Q.15**
100	

Q.7 During this campaign, did you feel you learned enough about the candidates and the issues to make an informed choice between the candidates, or did you find it difficult to choose because you felt you did not learn enough from the campaign?

		11/88**
60**	Learned enough to make an informed choice	59
38	Did not learn enough from the campaign	39
2	Don't know	2
100		100

(**Based on those who said they voted; N=797)

*Q.8 We are interested in how people got to know about political candidates this fall. Which gave you a better idea of where candidates stood on issues - news reports or tv commercials and advertisements about the candidates?

		5/87*
63	News reports	81
28	Candidates commercials and advertisements	13
9	No opinion	6
100		100

*Q.9 Which gave you a better idea of what the candidates were like personally - news reports or candidates tv commercials and advertisements?

		5/87*
53	News reports	70
38	Candidates commercials and advertisements	23
9	No opinion	7
100		100

*Q.10 Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, or Fail to describe the quality of their work. Looking back over the campaign, what grade would you give to each of the following groups for the way they did their jobs in the campaign? First...

	A	B	C	D	FAIL	DK	Average Grade	
a. The press	22	44	22	5	3	4=100	2.8	C+
11/88	8	22	33	19	16	2=100	1.9	D+
b. The pollsters	13	32	28	7	4	16=100	2.5	C
11/88	13	29	29	12	11	6=100	2.2	C
c. The campaign consultants	7	23	27	10	5	28=100	2.2	C
11/88	5	20	37	14	8	16=100	2.4	C+
d. The Republican Party	10	33	33	10	6	8=100	2.3	C
11/88	11	34	31	12	10	2=100	2.2	C
e. The Democratic Party	16	34	32	8	3	7=100	2.6	C
11/88	7	26	45	13	7	2=100	2.1	C

(Trend for 11/88 is based on those who voted)
(*Based on registered voters; N=969)

*Q.11 How much influence do you feel news organizations had on which candidates won the elections in your state this fall. Do you think they had too much influence, too little influence or about the right amount of influence?

		10/88*
31	Too much	58
9	Too little	3
56	Right amount	36
4	Don't know	3
100		100

*Q.12 Are you aware of any news stories that reviewed and discussed the tv commercials of any of the candidates running for office in your state?

38	Yes	
57	No	GO TO Q.14
5	Don't know	GO TO Q.14
100		

***Q.13 Do you approve or disapprove of such news reporting?

73	Approve
23	Disapprove
4	Don't know
100	

(*** Based on registered voters who were aware of such reporting; N=674)

*Q.14 Did things come up which kept you from voting last week or did you have the opportunity to vote?

82	Yes, voted - GO TO Q.16
18	No, did not vote - GO TO Q.15
100	

(*Based on registered voters; N=969)

****Q.15 Which of one these statements best describe you? (READ CATEGORIES 1-3)

36	I wish I had voted in the elections this past week	GO TO DEMOS
13	I'm glad I didn't vote	
45	I have mixed feelings about not voting	
6	Don't know	
100		

(****Based on people who were not registered and did not vote in last week's election)

**Q.16 Did you vote for a Republican candidate for Congress for your district, or a Democratic candidate?

39	Republican candidate
47	Democratic candidate
3	Other
9	Don't remember
2	Did not vote for Congress
100	

(**Based on those who said they voted; N=797)